

Amendments to the Claims

1-8. (Cancelled)

9. (Currently amended) A support member for a high pressure filtration semipermeable membrane,

said support member formed of a nonwoven fabric,

said nonwoven fabric formed of polyester fibers which are heat bound to each other into at least one monolayered paper web, said polyester fibers containing 30-70% by weight of a polyester fiber having a double refraction (Δn) of 0.170 or more, a heat shrinkage stress at 200°C of 0.10-0.60 g/d, and a mean single fiber fineness of 1.0-6.5 denier, and

said nonwoven fabric having a mean value of breaking length at an elongation of 5% in a lengthwise direction (MD) and a crosswise direction (CD) of 4.0 km or more, having an air permeability of 0.2-5.0 cc/cm²•s, and having a pore size (maximum pore diameter) of 42 µm or less,

wherein said nonwoven fabric is made by a process comprising the steps of:

(i) forming a first monolayered paper web comprising said polyester fiber having a double refraction (Δn) of 0.170 or more, a heat shrinkage stress at 200°C of 0.10-0.60 g/d, and a mean single fiber fineness of 1.0-6.5 denier together with a heat weldable polyester binder fiber (~~except for conjugate fiber~~) in a weight ratio of 70:30-30:70,

(ii) subjecting the first monolayered paper web to a heat treatment under pressure to bind the fibers to each other,

(iii) optionally applying a second monolayered paper web to said first monolayered paper web, and

(iv) repeating step (ii).

10. (Previously presented) The support member according to claim 9, wherein said nonwoven fabric contains said polyester fiber in an amount of 50-70% by weight.

11. (Previously presented) The support member according to claim 9, wherein said polyester fiber is poly(alkylene arylate) comprised of a diol unit selected from an ethylene glycol unit and a 1,4-butanediol unit and a dicarboxylic acid unit selected from a terephthalic acid unit and a naphthalenedicarboxylic acid unit.

12. (Withdrawn) A process for preparing a support member for a semipermeable membrane, which comprises:

(i) forming a monolayered paper web comprising a polyester fiber having a double refraction (Δn) of 0.170 or more and a heat shrinkage stress at 200°C of 0.10-0.60 g/d, and a heat weldable binder fiber in a weight ratio of 70:30-30:70, and

(ii) subjecting the monolayered paper web to a heat treatment under pressure to bind the fibers to each other.

13. (Withdrawn) The process according to claim 12, which further comprises

(iii) laminating a second monolayered paper web or other fibrous web on the heat-treated monolayered paper web, and then

(iv) subjecting the laminated webs to a heat treatment under pressure to bind the webs together.

14. (Withdrawn) The process according to claim 12, wherein the heat weldable binder fiber is a polyester fiber.

15. (Withdrawn) A process for preparing a support member for a semipermeable membrane, which comprises:

(i) forming a monolayered paper web comprising a polyester fiber having a double refraction (Δn) of 0.170 or more and a heat shrinkage stress at 200°C of 0.10-0.60 g/d, and a heat weldable binder fiber, in a weight ratio of 70:30-30:70, and

(ii) laminating a second monolayered paper web or other fibrous web on the monolayered paper web, and then

(iii) subjecting the laminated webs to a heat treatment under pressure to bind the webs together.

16. (Withdrawn) The process according to claim 15, wherein the heat weldable binder fiber is a polyester fiber.

17. (Previously presented) A semipermeable membrane comprising a semipermeable film formed on a side of the support member according to claim 9.

18. (Currently amended) A high pressure filtration nonwoven fabric, formed of polyester fibers which are heat bound to each other into at least one monolayered paper web, said polyester fibers containing 30-70% by weight of a polyester fiber having a double refraction (Δn) of 0.170 or more, a heat shrinkage stress at 200°C of 0.10-0.60 g/d, and a mean single fiber fineness of 1.0-6.5 denier, and

said nonwoven fabric having a mean value of breaking length at an elongation of 5% in a lengthwise direction (MD) and a crosswise direction (CD) of 4.0 km or more, having an air permeability of 0.2-5.0 cc/cm²•s, and having a pore size (maximum pore diameter) of 42 μm or less,

wherein said nonwoven fabric is made by a process comprising the steps of:

(i) forming a first monolayered paper web comprising said polyester fiber having a double refraction (Δn) of 0.170 or more, a heat shrinkage stress at 200°C of 0.10-0.60 g/d, and a mean single fiber fineness of 1.0-6.5 denier together with a heat weldable polyester binder fiber (~~except for conjugate fiber~~) in a weight ratio of 70:30-30:70,

(ii) subjecting the first monolayered paper web to a heat treatment under pressure to bind the fibers to each other,

(iii) optionally applying a second monolayered paper web to said first monolayered paper web, and

(iv) repeating step (ii),

wherein a semipermeable film is formed on a side of said nonwoven fabric.

19. (Previously presented) The support member according to claim 9, wherein the first monolayered paper web is subjected to a heat treatment in step (ii) at a temperature in a range of 150-260°C.

20. (Previously presented) The high pressure filtration nonwoven fabric according to claim 18, wherein the first monolayered paper web is subjected to a heat treatment in step (ii) at a temperature in a range of 150-260°C.